



# United States Department of the Interior

## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Vale District Office  
100 Oregon Street  
Vale, Oregon 97918-9630  
<http://www.or.blm.gov/Vale/>

IN REPLY REFER TO:

August 29, 2000

Dear Concerned Citizen:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Baker Resource Area of the Vale District, is planning activities in the Courtney Creek area (see enclosed map). This letter is to alert you to the proposals and to solicit your comments to help with the planning process.

### **Project Area Description**

The project area is located in the upper portion of the Courtney Creek drainage of the Lower Grande Ronde River watershed. The legal description of the area is portions of: T.5 N., R.43E., Sec 23, 24 and 25; T.5 S, R44E, Sec 19, 20, 31, 32 and 33. The project area consists of 752 acres of forest land, primarily located on the north aspects above Courtney Creek. Tree species include Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine and some larch. There are few usable roads in the project area, creating restricted access.

### **Purpose and Need for the Action**

The purpose of the project is to increase tree vigor, reduce the incidence of insect and disease within the forested stands of the area and reduce the potential for a hot stand replacing fire.

Forest stands in the Courtney Creek area are very dense. Historically, wildfire acted as a natural thinning agent within these stands. With the exclusion of fire, many of the forested areas have developed a dense understory of smaller younger trees and high fuel accumulations. Dense stand conditions have reduced stand vigor and increased susceptibility to disease and insect infestation.

Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe infections are moderate to severe throughout the area. Douglas-fir dwarf mistletoe can also reduce tree vigor and predispose individual trees to bark beetle attack. Douglas-fir beetle (*D. pseudotsugae*) activity has been noted in the area. Bark beetles have killed many of the oldest larger trees and some of the younger trees.

There are many standing dead trees and downed woody debris resulting from dwarf mistletoe infections, bark beetle attacks, and a past severe wind event. The understory trees within these stands provide ladder fuels by which fire can climb into the forest

canopy. Because of the current fuel conditions, there is a potential for a hot crown fire to develop within these stands if a fire is ignited in the area.

### **Preliminary Proposed Action**

The proposed action is designed to address the forest health concerns of the Courtney Creek area. The preliminary proposal is to thin the overstocked stands. The forest stands would be thinned from below, generally leaving larger trees, and removing smaller trees. Both commercial and pre-commercial sized trees would be cut. Some larger Douglas-fir trees may also be removed, if heavily infected with dwarf mistletoe. The objective of the thinning would be to increase the vigor of the remaining trees by removing the competing smaller trees and reducing the number of trees infected with dwarf mistletoe. Removal of the understory trees would also reduce ladder fuels and reduce the potential for a crown fire. Prescribed fire may also be used to reduce ground fuels following the thinning treatments.

### ***Design Features***

Design features are actions taken as part of a proposal to reduce or avoid negative effects of a proposed action.

*Use of helicopters to remove timber.* Because of the steep slopes and limited access to the Courtney Creek area, use of a helicopter is proposed for timber removal. Building roads on the steep terrain would be difficult and could impact visual and water quality and damage fish habitat.

*Stream side buffers.* Stream side buffers are proposed to protect riparian habitat and maintain healthy conditions for bull trout, steelhead, and salmon, found in the Grande Ronde watershed. PACFISH standards (protective measures) would be used for riparian buffers. The proposed buffers would include 300 feet on each side of fish bearing streams, 150 feet on each side of perennial non-fish bearing streams, and 50 feet on each side of intermittent streams. Currently no activities are proposed within these buffer areas. Approximately twenty-five percent of the forested area would be within these stream side buffers. If further analysis shows a need to enter these areas in order to protect or enhance riparian habitat for fish, there could be some activities proposed. However, any proposed activities within the buffers would be designed to enhance or protect the riparian habitat and water quality for fish.

### **Preliminary Issues and Concerns**

Some preliminary issues were identified during the process of developing the proposal. Some of these issues have been addressed through design features as mentioned above. These issues include:

1. The potential degradation of fish habitat caused by road building and timber harvesting near streams is a concern. This concern was addressed by proposing the use of helicopters and stream side buffers.

2. The loss of big game cover is a concern. Thinning the forest stands in the area would reduce the amount of cover available for big game in the area.

**Your Comments and Concerns**

At this time, the Courtney Creek Forest Health Project area is being examined and analyzed to determine what management actions would be most appropriate and beneficial to all components of the area, including fish, wildlife, plants, soil, etc. The overall goal of the Courtney Creek analysis is to address the forest problem in a way that will result in a healthy ecosystem.

I welcome your comments, suggestions, ideas, and concerns regarding this proposal. If you have additional questions regarding this project you may contact Dick Watson at 541-523-1339. Please send your written feedback to me at the address at the top of this letter by November 1, 2000.

Sincerely,

*s/Penelope Dunn Woods*

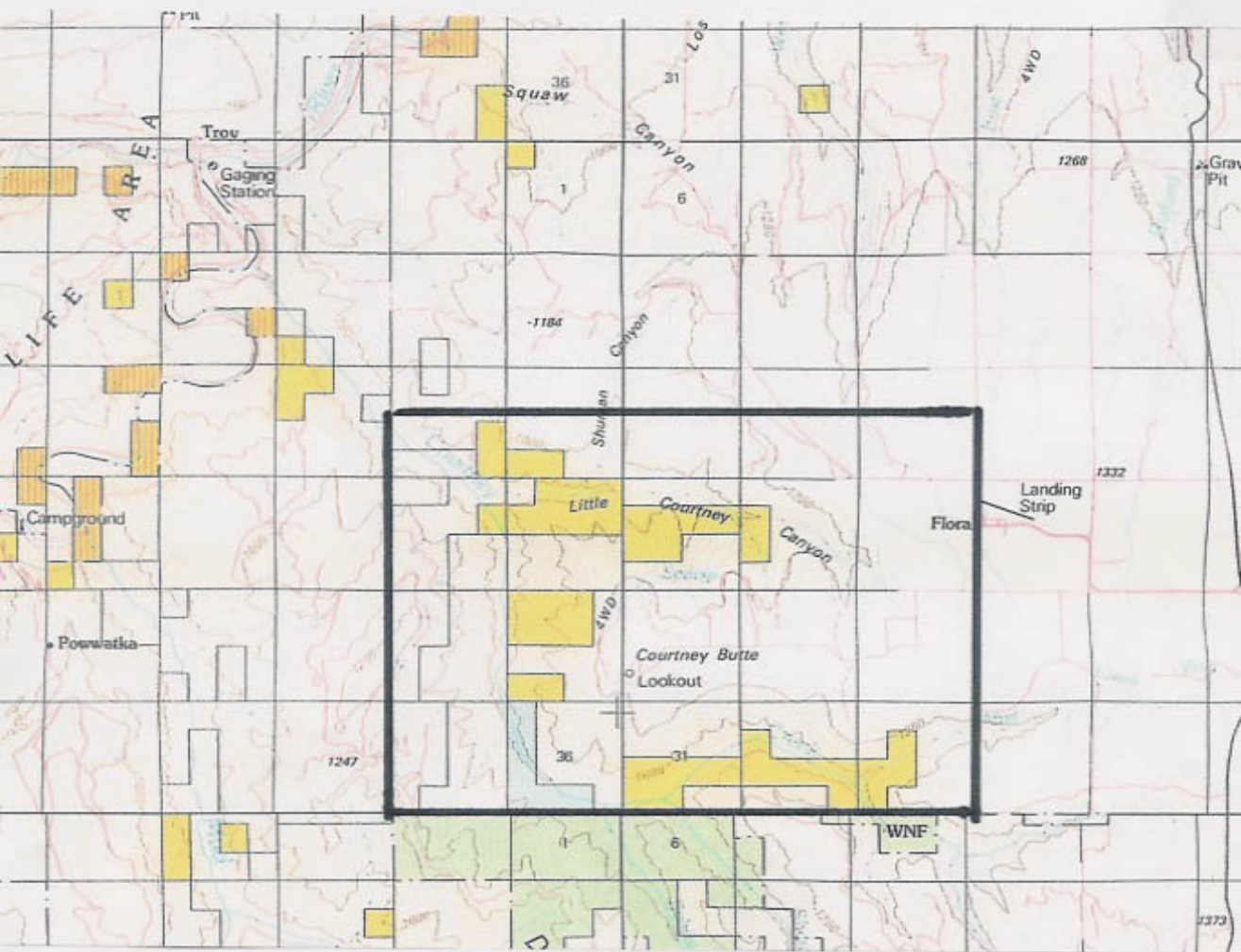
Penelope Dunn Woods  
Field Manager, Baker Resource Area

Attachment: Map

# Courtney Creek Forest Health Project

R. 43 E.

R. 44 E.



Public Lands (Administered By  
Bureau of Land Management) . . . . .



National Forest . . . . .



State Lands

